

Fame. (But will it sell?)

by Jeff Zimman
Journal Staff

"For a patent, they charge you your testicles and both eyelids, and then you still have to sell it to someone," inventor Malcolm Winsor said in summing up the travails of the independent inventor.

Thousands of hours and dollars go into coming up with a concept, developing a prototype and securing a patent. And that apparently is the easy part, compared to bringing the product to market and earning a return.

But early next month New England's independent inventors will get an opportunity to show their wares to the public, and, they hope, to potential investors.

From Feb. 5-7, the Independent Inventors Association of New England and the Museum of Science will co-sponsor their third annual Inventor's Weekend. At least 30 of the would-be innovators will exhibit prototypes for everything from the world's fastest sailboat to a device that turns a golfclub into a rake.

Last year 24 exhibitors participated in the show. According to show organizer Donald Meeker, six exhibits were subsequently written up in Design News. Five are now in production.

In the tough world of inventing, that's a helluva showing.

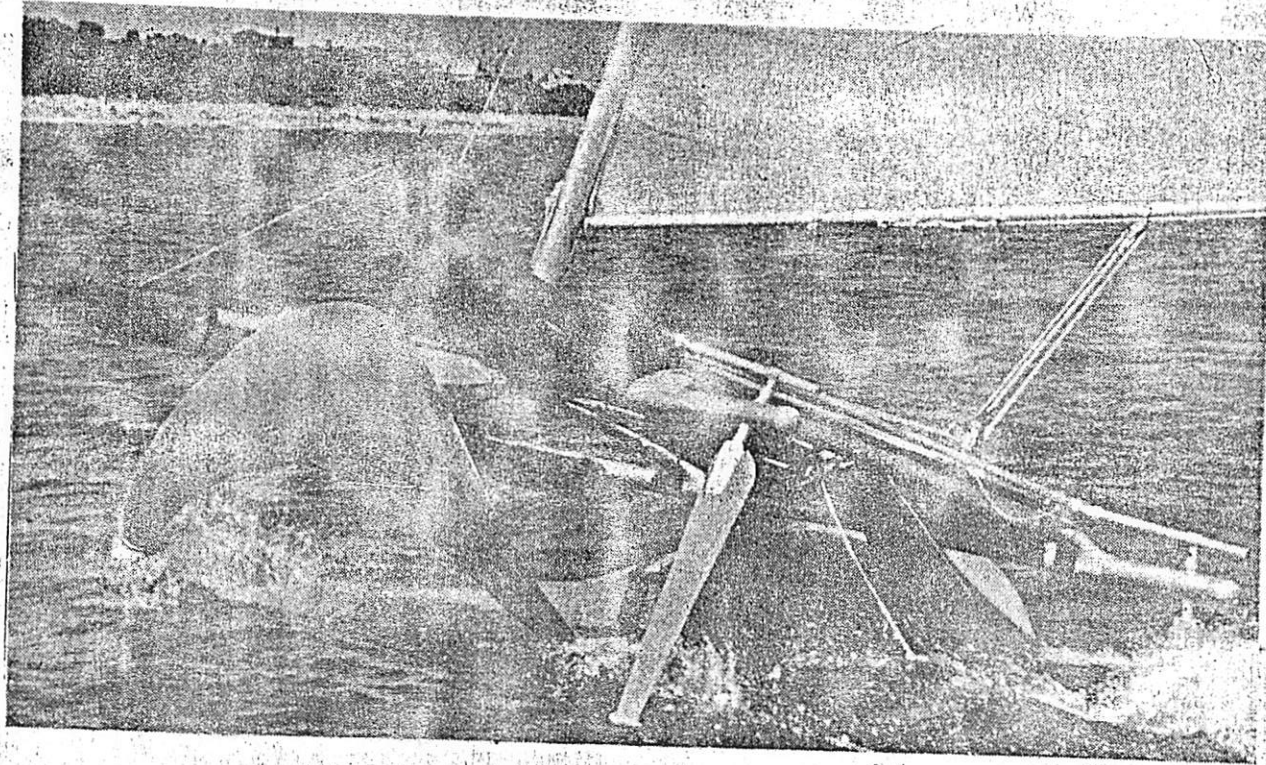
Behind every invention there is an interesting story. Harvey Kertzman says he was at home in Quincy watching President Jimmy Carter on the tube, when the concept for an electrical generator using masses of ocean water first hit him.

"It was weird," Kertzman recalled. "He was talking about how we had to come up with our own resources to solve the energy problem. He looked me straight in the eye; it was like we were talking to each other. I took it as a personal challenge."

Kertzman, who owns a Volkswagen repair shop, looked around and realized that the ocean was by far the region's most powerful and ubiquitous force. He immediately came up with the concept of using the tides to fill a floating tank. The force of the tank's weight as the tide moves in and out is to be harnessed through cables to turn a generator.

"You could call it moon power," he says, adding his hope that tanks the size of a tennis court will

PEOPLE - CUDMORE



Patrick Cudmore's hydrofoil sailboat is expected to generate much excitement among those who visit the Museum of Science's Inventors Show . . . never mind the wobblegg or the bug eye.

A number of Cudmore's other inventions already are featured at the museum in a small display designed to pique interest in the upcoming show. These include a two-foot-high, yellow, egg-shaped seat, called a wobblegg, which is a child's maneuverable rocker; a magnifying instrument, called a bug eye, into which one can insert insects for examination; and several devices using a rotary propeller—one allows disabled airplanes to glide to a landing, another places a rotary wind reaper into a kite to capture wind power.

These items represent the kind of diversity in invention to be found at the upcoming show.

received rave reviews, but no one would make a commitment to enable mass manufacturing.

This year Winsor is slated to exhibit a set of hydraulic stilts. The wearer need only push a button on his belt to rise up several feet. The device could be used by a photographer trying to get a clear shot from the midst of a crowd, or plasterers working on a ceiling.

But a disillusioned Winsor says he'll probably skip the show this year. "You know, fame and 30 cents will buy you a cup of coffee."

hood. A smaller prototype will be on exhibit at the museum.

A personal tragedy led to an invention Charles Wyckoff will have on display. His son died nine years ago in a head-on collision while traveling the wrong way on a foggy night on a Cape highway. Wyckoff has come up with a "bi-directional" traffic line.

If you're going the right way, it looks like an ordinary white traffic line, but if you're traveling in the wrong direction, it appears red. Wyckoff has yet to come up with a way to mass-produce the traffic strips, which are patented, economically.

But the former EG&G engineer is moving toward production and marketing of another one of his inventions. It is a plastic strip that can be pasted on the highway instead of the painted lines. Glass beads increase the visibility of the line in inclement weather. Wyckoff says it won't wear out nearly as quickly as the paint, which usually is replaced every three months on major highways and once a year on city streets. These strips will last 10 years, meaning they will only need to be replaced when a road is resurfaced.

The first exhibit visitors will see as they enter the show, and the one expected to generate the most excitement, is a hydrofoil sailboat designed by Patrick Cudmore of Duxbury.

Cudmore began work on the boat a decade ago. His original intent was to design a boat that would work very well in light winds. What evolved is a boat that is expected to smash all sail speed records.

In design, it looks very much like a catamaran. In fact, Cudmore calls it a Hydrocat. The boat is expected to move at 2.5 times the wind speed. According to Cudmore, the best achieved now is 1.5 times the true wind speed.

At 3.5 knots the boat moves from a buoyant to a hydro dynamic. At 14 knots it is hydro-planing. And the highly maneuverable boat is expected to easily break the 34-knot record set by a sailboat built solely for one-way speed runs. Last year it won the Rolex Award for Enterprise.

any door into a solar heat collector. There's a folding windshield for motorcycles, a hearing aid that places a mini-microphone directly in the ear canal, a variety of educational games, oil spill recovery equipment, and a tennis racquet holder that will fit any two tennis racquets—to name but a handful.

Venture capitalists and other businessmen are invited to a preview from 3:30 to 5:00 Friday afternoon. Doors will open to the public that night.

Over the weekend speakers will tell the inventors how to protect their inventions with patents, and most importantly, how to arrange leases and independent marketing. That last area is the bane of every independent inventor.

Richard Reynolds, for example, plans to display a device that transforms an ordinary motorcycle into a three-wheel enclosed car. He developed it four years ago, has two working prototypes on the road, but has been unable to market it.

"It's the Wright Brothers' syndrome," he explained. "Everyone says it will never get off the ground. No one wants to take a chance."

Reynolds' patented device would allow a motorcycle owner to convert his bike into a car during inclement weather. First, Reynolds removes the front wheel and fork from the cycle and then he attaches a piece of a VW chassis on which a body can be built.

It has two wheels in the front and one in the back, side by side seats, a steering wheel and all the other standard dashboard equipment.

It seems perfect for New England, where cyclists are forced off the road all winter, but Reynolds is going to San Diego next to look for a manufacturing and marketing outlet. Unless, of course, some angel descends with the needed capital as a result of the show.

That could happen. But it didn't last year for the most widely praised entrant in the show. That was a wheelchair equipped with a caterpillar tread to climb steps, a device that is still sitting on Malcolm Winsor's shelf.

Winsor says nearly a half million dollars went into developing and perfecting prototypes, which

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